

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for enabling a user of a mail receptacle to remotely receive information relating to the content, if any, of such mail receptacle, the method comprising the steps of:

5 generating status information for the mail receptacle, the status information including information indicating whether the mail receptacle contains one or more mail items; storing the status information in a computer system; and

10 providing the status information to the user via the computer system, whereby the user can determine from a location spatially remote from the mail receptacle whether the mail receptacle contains the one or more mail items.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein the generating step includes generating information indicating the number of said one or more mail items delivered to the mail receptacle.

3. The method of claim 1 wherein the generating step includes generating information indicating the class of said one or more mail items.

4. The method of claim 1 wherein the generating step includes generating information indicating approximately when the one or more mail items will be delivered to the mail receptacle.

5. The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of permitting the user to identify the one or more mail items for which status information should be generated.

6. The method of claim 1 wherein the computer system is connected in communication with a computer network and the

providing step includes permitting the user to receive the
status information stored in the computer system through the
5 computer network.

7. The method of claim 6 wherein the computer network is
the World Wide Web.

8. The method of claim 6 wherein the providing step
includes sending electronic messages from the computer
system to the user through the computer network.

9. The method of claim 1 further comprising the steps of
updating the status information when one or more mail items
are delivered to the mail receptacle and notifying the user
when the status information is updated.

10. The method of claim 1 wherein the generating step
includes generating the status information using a detection
device associated with the mail receptacle.

11. The method of claim 1 wherein the generating step
includes manually inspecting the mail receptacle to
determine whether it contains the one or more mail items and
generating the status information based on the results of
5 the inspecting step.

12. The method of claim 11 wherein the generating step
includes recording status data in a portable computer device
and the storing step includes transferring the recorded
status data from the portable computer device to the
5 computer system.

13. A method for enabling mail receptacle users to remotely
receive information relating to the contents, if any, of
their mail receptacles, the method comprising the steps of:

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5 delivered to such mail receptacle, and information
indicating the class of said one or more mail items.

19. The method of claim 13 further comprising the step of
generating the status information using a plurality of
detection devices, each detection device being associated
with a different one of the mail receptacles.

20. The method of claim 19 wherein the plurality of
detection devices are each connected to the computer system
through a communication link.

21. The method of claim 13 further comprising the step of
sending electronic notices to the mail receptacle users via
the computer system.

22. The method of claim 21 wherein the mail receptacles are
leased mail receptacles and the electronic notices include
electronic billing notices for the leased mail receptacles.

23. The method of claim 13 further comprising the step of
generating historical usage reports for each mail
receptacle.

24. A computer system having a memory device, the memory
device storing status information for each of a plurality of
mail receptacles, each mail receptacle having at least one
user associated therewith, the status information for each
5 mail receptacle including information indicating whether
such mail receptacle contains one or more mail items, the
computer system being configured for providing the status
information for each mail receptacle to its associated user,
whereby each user can determine from a location spatially
10 remote from its associated mail receptacle whether such mail
receptacle contains one or more mail items.

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25. The computer system of claim 24 wherein the computer system is connected to a computer network and configured for permitting each mail receptacle user to access the status information for its associated mail receptacle through the computer network.

26. The computer system of claim 25 wherein the computer network is the World Wide Web.

27. The computer system of claim 25 wherein the plurality of mail receptacles are clustered mail receptacles.

28. The computer system of claim 27 wherein the clustered mail receptacles are leased mail receptacles and the computer system is configured for sending billing notices for the leased mail receptacles to the associated users through the computer network.

29. A method for enabling a user to remotely receive information relating to mail to be delivered to the user, the method comprising the steps of:

generating status information for the mail to be delivered, the status information including information indicating the number of items;

storing the status information according to user in a computer system; and

providing to the user access to the status information via the computer system, whereby the user can determine information about the mail to be delivered to the user.

30. The method of claim 29 wherein the generating step includes generating the status information as the mail to be delivered to the user is sorted.

31. The method of claim 30 wherein the providing step includes sending the status information to the user via email.

32. The method of claim 1 wherein the generating step includes generating the status information at a point of process in a mail delivery system.

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